

**INTRODUCTION:**  
**Nutrition SENSE**



# Introduction

**Are you interested in providing and promoting healthful foods and beverages at your student store, but are not sure how to make this change so that business success will follow?**

**If so, you have arrived at the right place. This toolkit will guide you through the key concepts and considerations necessary to make these positive changes. In the end, your school store will not only continue to be profitable, it will contribute to student health and well being in your school.**

## Why Make Changes that Encourage Nutritious Snacking?

Children and teens spend a large portion of their day in the school setting. Because of this, much of their daily food intake occurs at school. Some of this is from the cafeteria or from bag lunches brought from home. However, an increasing amount of food consumed at school is from student-run school stores. Traditionally, the nutritional value of food and beverages sold at these stores has not been good, since most items sold are high-sugar or high fat.

### **Healthy eating is important for growth, good health and academic performance:**

**Healthy Eating Optimizes Growth.** The children and teens who are the customers at school stores are in an important growth phase of their lives. This is a student's only chance to achieve full stature, optimize bone density and establish life-long healthy eating habits. Eating healthy foods will provide these growing students with the nutrient rich fuel they need.

**Healthy Eating Helps to Prevent Chronic Disease.** Healthy eating habits play a large role in the promotion of health, while, poor eating habits are directly associated with the development of obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, osteoporosis, cancer and other diseases. In fact, next to tobacco use, poor diet/inactivity is the second lifestyle related cause of death in the United States.

Currently, approximately 15 percent of American children and adolescents are overweight. This translates to approximately 8 million children and teens. The prevalence of overweight has nearly tripled among children and teens in the past two decades.

Previously considered an adult disease, type 2 diabetes has increased dramatically in children and teens, especially those who are overweight. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control recently (2003) estimated that one in three people born in the U.S. in 2000 will develop type 2 diabetes sometime in their life – unless significant changes in eating and exercise habits occur.

If healthy nutrition habits can be established early, the incidence of these diseases can be lessened. Also, we know that even for those who currently have poor dietary habits, if they make positive dietary changes, their likelihood of suffering from these nutrition related chronic diseases lessens. The school store is an important piece of the puzzle of optimizing the healthful opportunities for children and teens throughout the school environment.

**Healthy Eating Better Academic Achievement.** Nutrition affects children's and teens' ability to learn. This link has been clearly supported through controlled research studies. Inadequate nutrition is a major cause of impaired cognitive development and is associated with increased educational failure and behavioral problems.

In fact, research has shown the following related to nutrition and academic performance:

- One study found that the fourth grade students who had the least protein intake in their diet had the lowest achievement scores.
- A large-scale study showed that hungry children were two to three times more likely to have behavioral and academic problems than children classified as “not hungry”.

Numerous studies have shown that:

- Kids who eat breakfast seem to have an easier time learning as demonstrated through:
  - > Ability to concentrate
  - > Fewer errors
  - > Higher test scores
  - > More creativity
  - > Faster work
- Kids who eat breakfast are more likely to be in school as demonstrated by:
  - > Fewer absences
  - > Less tardiness
  - > Less time spent in school nurse’s office
- Kids who eat breakfast behave better in school as demonstrated by:
  - > Fewer fights
  - > Greater cooperation
  - > Fewer trips to the principal’s office
  - > Fewer conflicts with classmates

Studies have linked iron deficiency to lower achievement on standardized tests.

Clearly, the school store can be part of the solution to bettering student growth potential, overall health and academic achievement. If the choices available in student stores provide students the opportunity to get important nutrients AND the store makes a profit, everyone wins. This toolkit will provide you with the information to achieve this win-win situation in your school.

## Words of Wisdom from Montana Schools

As you read through this kit, you will realize that Montana students will choose healthful items if they are readily accessible and affordable at school stores. Recent Montana focus groups (done with teens) have also told us that some teens think the unhealthful items should not be available at school or they will choose them over the healthful items. You and your students can decide what strategies and techniques will work best for your own school student store. We hope this kit is helpful to you in learning steps to improve your student store in regard to the many aspects of nutrition, from food safety to selling and marketing of healthful foods and beverages. You are to be commended for your efforts in making it easier for students and staff in your school community to make healthful choices.

To start the process of Students Encouraging Nutritious Snacks (SEN\$E) in your store, we encourage you to take a few minutes with your students to complete the following initial Nutrition SEN\$E Worksheet. This information is helpful in determining your plan and first steps.

# Nutrition SENSE

## INITIAL WORKSHEET

*Have Your Students Help You Brainstorm to Answer the Following Questions:*

1. What are your initial ideas for the types of healthful foods and beverages you want to sell?

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2. How will you promote these foods and beverages to the students and staff?

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3. Who are some key partners you may want to work with in purchasing, selling and promoting healthful foods and beverages?

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4. What will be your biggest challenges in selling and promoting healthful foods and beverages to students and staff?

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